



StubbyDog™
Rediscover the pit bull.

It's Not Just How They Were Raised

When adopting adults, it's what you see in front of you that matters

By Micaela Myers

"It's how they're raised." Every pit bull person has heard this refrain. When pit bulls get media attention for the wrong reasons, we often say, "It's not the breed, it's how they were raised." And the idea has sunk in, with unintended consequences.

As a volunteer for a pit bull rescue, I heard it over and over again. "We really want to adopt a puppy because we want to raise it right."

In fact, the majority of adopters I talked to wouldn't even consider adopting an adult pit bull, especially if their pasts were unknown. When the rescue would get litters of puppies, they were always adopted quickly, while wonderful adults would stay for up to two years awaiting homes.



While how you raise a puppy is certainly important in helping that puppy grow up into a good canine citizen, it doesn't mean that adult dogs with unknown or even abusive pasts won't have ideal temperaments. Many adult dogs have such wonderful personalities that no matter where they've been, they still look at the world with nothing but love in their hearts.

"If you see the dog right now at an adult age, and he's a good dog, it doesn't matter what his history was. It's a moot point," explained expert trainer Marthina McClay. Marthina is a CPDT, certified professional dog trainer. She's also director of [Our Pack, Inc.](#), a San Francisco-based pit bull rescue; an [Animal Behavior College Mentor Trainer](#); a certified tester/observer for Therapy Dogs, Inc.; and an AKC certified CGC evaluator.

With adult dogs, what you see personality and temperament wise is what you're going to get, Marthina said. "It's an easier decision for many to make because you can assess whether the dog matches the needs of the family."

Case in Point

My own dog Omega (*photo right*) is an excellent example of why people should consider adult dogs when looking for the perfect fit for their family. Omega was 3.5 years old when we met her at a [Pit Bull Rescue San Diego](#) adoption event. I wanted a dog that could be a therapy dog. If I had adopted a puppy, no matter how perfectly I raised him or her, there is no guarantee that puppy would grow up to have the temperament or personality to make an ideal therapy dog. However, it was clear Omega's calm and loving temperament would make her a wonderful therapy pet. Within months she was certified.



“Our Vick dog was a good example,” Marthina said. “He became a therapy dog in five weeks. He was probably around 2.5 years old when we got him. He trained very, very quickly and slipped right into that therapy dog position because that’s who he was and that’s what he wanted to do. But when he was 4 months old, we wouldn’t have known he was going to be like that. I guess that would be my point. Working with adult dogs is much easier if you just look at them and evaluate what their personalities are like in any given environment, and that’s who they are.”

As an example of a senior dog with a rough past that is nonetheless an awesome family dog, Marthina shares the story of Bernie, (*photo right*) one of the dogs rescued from the [Ohio 200](#) case. Bernie was between 7 and 8 years old when he came to [Our Pack](#). “He had a crappy start,” Marthina said. “He lived a long time on a chain. But he was just recently adopted. He’s still active, and they go and do things — they go on hikes, they go to the park. They have three kids. He loves the kids, and the kids love him. He fits right into the household. He’s one of my favorite dogs we’ve adopted out. He’s just fabulous.”



And yes, adult dogs are perfectly capable of learning new tricks. “We’ve taken dogs from dog fighting busts that didn’t know anything and taught them to sit, down and stay and do all sorts of things,” Marthina said. “Some of them were 4, 5, 6 years old learning to sit and do a down, and had never done that sort of thing. They actually pick it up a little bit faster [than puppies].”

In addition to knowing exactly the personality and temperament you’re getting, adopting adults comes with other benefits.

“Often they’re already potty trained, and if not, they potty train much more quickly,” Marthina said. Many adult dogs may also be crate trained or already know basic obedience and house manners. “They learn the rules much more quickly.”

Finding the Right Dog for Your Family

For people that are open to adopting an adult dog, Marthina offers advice on how to find the right match.

“One of the first things is your activity level,” she said. If you love to hike, run or play ball, than a more active dog will be a great match. Those who prefer snuggling on the couch should look for a mellower adult.

“If you’re adopting from a rescue, ask the foster home or ask the rescue how active the dog is and how affectionate,” Marthina said. “Ask questions about the dog’s personality. Often rescues like ours, we foster the dog for a minimum of a month before we put the dog up for adoption. That way we kind of know the dog inside and out. That way you can get a better match in regards to what you’re looking for.”



Adopting an adult can be perfect for a family with young children, as raising a puppy and little ones at the same time easily becomes overwhelming.

“If you have children, you want to bring your kids in to meet the dog,” Marthina said. “How does the dog react around your children? Is it a match with the kids as far as the children’s energy and the dog’s energy?”

Finally, make sure the dog gets along with your current pets through careful introductions in a controlled environment.

Take Home Messages

“I’ll hear people walk by a kennel with an adult dog in it and say, ‘No, I really want to get a puppy so we can mold him and raise him the way we want.’ I think, wait, check this guy out, he may already be what you want,” Marthina said. “See if he works with your family. Often people are surprised. Even if you don’t know his background, check out his temperament now.”

She also urges people not to overlook senior dogs. “Seniors are great,” Marthina said. “They are usually housetrained. They aren’t chewing on anything. They’re usually much more calm. They like cuddling on the couch with you more. I think what’s really sad about it is that people will just walk by those kennels. They just don’t tend to take them. Seniors are awesome. They just seem so thankful. It’s so easy to give them a nice bed, good food and love, and they’re very appreciative of just that. They don’t need to be walking three miles a day. They’re very happy to just lounge around and relax.”

Marthina’s rescue focuses mainly on taking in adult dogs. After growing up with Dobermans, she was familiar with how myths, misconceptions and stereotypes can haunt certain breeds. Now, she helps change pit bull misconceptions through foster, adoption and training programs, and her website blog posts. She hopes to rescue more senior dogs in the future and promote their fabulous attributes to adopters.



StubbyDog™

Rediscover the pit bull.